

# **COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS CARRY POLICY NETWORK ANALYSIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study provides a policy network analysis on the implications of HB 792 and HB 280 at urban two-year open campuses, with specific attention to Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC), a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). Georgia state legislators passed House Bills 792 and 280, which authorized any person 18 years of age or older to carry an electroshock device and firearm, respectively, on Georgia public colleges and universities effective. A mixed method research design was employed to assess crime rates and college administrator opinions on the need for the campus carry policy. Employing a policy network theory into this study provides greater clarity on how interest groups establish networks and maintain relationships with government officials to move political ideologies from the legislatures to college campuses.

## **I. Introduction**

Passage of House Bill 792 (HB 792), which authorized any person 18 years of age or older to carry an electroshock weapon onto a Georgia public college or university, represented yet another salvo in the debate on the right to bear arms. The passage of that law, which became effective on July 1, 2016, provided support for state elected officials to pursue legislative recourse to allow firearms and other weapons onto colleges and universities. As a result, Georgia state legislators subsequently passed House Bill 280 (HB 280), which authorized any person 18 years of age or older to carry a firearm on Georgia public colleges and universities effective July 1, 2017.

Proponents of campus carry legislation contend such policy will improve public safety and protect students from assault and other violent crimes. Opponents believe it can undermine academic freedom, increase personal injury, and reduce public safety while increasing costs. Regardless of the arguments, the recent rise in mass shootings nationally has reinvigorated the campus carry movement. As of 2016, eight states, (Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin) allow firearms on campus while two states (Arkansas and Tennessee) allow only faculty to carry weapons.

The Georgia campus carry campaign imposes a national conservative political agenda onto colleges and universities that have historically opposed policies that allow firearms onto campuses. During the 2016 legislative session, HB 792 and House Bill 859 (HB 859), *The Campus Carry Act*, were introduced to address campus safety. Neither bill increased resources for technology upgrades, training, expansion of police powers, improving intergovernmental relations with local law enforcement or funding for public safety personnel.

It is critical to determine how the existence of weapons on campuses will impact policies, procedures, budgets, emergency plans, training, personnel, technology, intergovernmental relations, college climate and other aspects related to policy implementation. This study intends to analyze HB 792 within the campus carry context for two reasons: 1. The bill represents a legislative vehicle to normalize the carrying of weapons onto college campuses; and, 2. The policy rationale and goals for HB 792 are founded in the campus carry narrative, improving public safety at our colleges and universities by allowing individuals the freedom to defend themselves.

For purposes of this research, a policy network analysis was conducted on the implications of HB 792 and HB 280 at urban two-year open campuses, with specific attention to Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC), a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), by reviewing GPTC policies and procedures while also conducting a survey with key college and public safety officials.

The impact of HB 792 on GPTC policies, procedures, resources, and climate is predicated on perspective. For college administrators, such policy does not further their mission to provide Georgians a quality postsecondary education and workforce training. Based on their responses, HB 792 will require the amending of policies, additional spending on public safety

education and staffing, and more training for students, faculty and staff alike. According to local law enforcement, allowing weapons on campus will not and does not change how they enforce the law. Furthermore, this research examines the campus carry debate from a macro (national) and micro (state) perspective. Moreover, it analyzes HB 792 using the policy process, and studies the role of interest groups to remove gun-free/weapon-free zone designation from Georgia public colleges and universities.

While investigating HB 792, it became evident the National Rifle Association (NRA) was very influential at each stage. They created a fear driven narrative by capitalizing on recent tragic events while ‘softening’ their argument by claiming campus carry can protect women from assault. The NRA, working with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), provided conservative state legislators model legislation and political cover. Furthermore, they used their vast financial resources and politically active membership to strategically maintain pressure while also providing state legislators the appropriate environment, language, and justification to champion campus carry in defiance of higher education officials, law enforcement, and students who oppose such action. The policy process does offer some insight on how HB 792 became law, but does not paint a complete picture.

Employing a policy network theory into this study provides greater clarity on how interest groups establish networks and maintain relationships with government officials. A common way interest groups do this is by offering resources and intellectual capital in exchange for legislative and/or programmatic action. Interest groups recognize the power of collaboration and cooperation. They play an active role in the policy process from problem identification to policy succession. HB 792 and HB 859 are two examples of how the NRA leveraged its

influence at the state level to pass legislation without receiving any endorsement or approval from the agencies obligated to implement them.

Lastly, the reality is Georgia public colleges and universities are operating under a new paradigm. No longer will they enjoy the unique designation as a gun-free/weapons-free zone. College presidents, administrators, and local law enforcement must work in tandem to maintain the peace while also taking the necessary steps to educate and empower the college community to stay vigilant, alert, and safe.

## **Literature Review**

### **A. Postsecondary Institutions**

Historically, postsecondary institutions have been immune to the gun debate (Smith, 2012). Yet, in 2007, with the shooting tragedies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Northern Illinois University and elsewhere, as well two U.S. Supreme Court cases, *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) and later, *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010), where both rulings collectively established a precedent disallowing governments from “prohibiting the individual ownership of guns for noncriminal use,” this reality changed considerably (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016; Morse, Sisneros, Perez, Sponsler, 2016; Bouffard, Nobles, Wells, Cavanaugh, 2012; Harnisch, 2008; Everytown For Gun Safety, 2015; Gertz, 2012; Smith, 2012). The National Rifle Association (NRA) and American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) viewed this as an opportunity to remove gun-free zone designation from college campuses (Gertz, 2012; Everytown for Gun Safety; 2015). Cairney (2012) refers to this phenomenon as a “window of opportunity” when “policy often changes when a number of events happen at the same time.”

In 2008, the NRA brought before ALEC a draft model legislation called the Campus Personal Protection Act, which was “unanimously adopted” by the latter’s Criminal Justice Task Force (Gertz, 2012). Within the same year, seventeen states introduced measures to expand gun rights onto colleges and universities (Harnish, 2008). These states were Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington (Ibid). Although aggressive in their approach, attempts at bill passage were thwarted by university administrators, campus police chiefs and numerous student groups (Bouffard, Nobles, Wells and Cavanaugh, 2012, 317).

## **B. Background of the Problem**

Proponents of campus carry legislation contend such policy will improve public safety and protect students from assault and other violent crimes (National Rifle Association; Nedzel, 2014; Kopel, 2015). Kopel (2015), in an editorial for *The Washington Post*, reviewed the impact of Colorado’s *Concealed Carry Act of 2003* and concluded that its passage did not lead to an increase in gun violence. Nedzel (2014, 435) in a more direct tone asserts, “it cannot be overemphasized that concealed carry has reduced violent crime every time it has been passed and is therefore most likely to reduce the incidence of mass shootings in schools.” Other arguments for weapons on campus include fears about the inability of campus police to provide adequate safety, protecting women from sexual assault and violence, and advancing 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights (Mulhere, 2015; Collins, 2016; Lund, 2016).

Opponents believe it can undermine academic freedom, increase personal injury and reduce public safety while increasing costs (West, 2016; Bartula, Bowen, 2015). To West (2016), “the debate over these laws typically centers on whether guns make schools more or less

safe. But those arguments overlook the real threat of campus carry laws: the evisceration of academic freedom.” She further proclaims that “University administrators and faculty members have argued that guns would discourage the teaching of sensitive issues” and that “a campus-carry law would bring millions of dollars in added costs for higher insurance, security, training and counseling.” Kaitlin Mulhere (2015) also provides evidence of significant additional costs to systems and individual colleges for safe implementation.

Regardless of the arguments proffered by anti-campus carry advocates, the recent rise in mass shootings nationally has reinvigorated the campus carry movement (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016; Morse, Sisneros, Perez, Sponsler, 2016). Per Morse (2016, 3), “Colleges and universities are mired in a national pandemic of active shooter violence.” Thus, campus carry has become a policy priority for conservative state legislators. In 2013, nineteen states introduced legislation; and in 2014, fourteen were filed (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016). By the end of 2015, fifteen states introduced bills to allow concealed or open firearms onto public colleges and universities (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016; Morse, Sisneros, Perez, Sponsler, 2016). As of 2016, eight states, (Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin) allow firearms on campus while two states (Arkansas and Tennessee) allow only faculty to carry weapons (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016).

Yet, even with most polls and surveys of higher education presidents, executives, faculty, staff, students and, law enforcement opposing the passage of such measures, state legislatures remain vigilant in their desire to adopt campus carry legislation (Khubchandani, Dake, Payton, Teeple, 2014; West, 2016; Bartula, Bowen, 2015). Research conducted by Khubchandani, Dake, Payton, and Teeple (2014) state, “Campus police chiefs (89%) believe that the best way of

limiting firearm violence on campuses is to keep firearms from being used on campuses.” In a national survey of college and university presidents on this issue, the findings were telling. 95% of presidents opposed students, faculty, and visitors carrying concealed handguns onto their campuses. More so, 92% believed their faculty and 89% believed their students “would feel unsafe if faculty, students, and visitors carried concealed handguns on campus (Ibid).”

### **III. Analysis of the Problem**

As public administrators, our actions are governed by policy; our decisions are determined by policy; our objectives are driven by policy. It is essential that we understand why certain measures are pursued and how it will impact our ability to consistently deliver whatever public good or service we are responsible for. As a higher education official, and student of public administration, it is necessary to fully understand the recent push to allow weapons onto public colleges and universities in the pursuit of improving campus safety. Daniel J. Hurley, Associate Vice President for Government Relations and State Policy at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), best describes the current campus carry climate as follows.

Despite the fact that virtually every higher education and law enforcement group opposes the idea of expanding the presence of handguns on public college campuses, state legislatures throughout the country continue to introduce legislation to do exactly that (Hurley, 2015).

As important, it is critical to determine how the existence of weapons on campuses will impact policies, procedures, budgets, emergency plans, training, personnel, technology, intergovernmental relations, college climate and other aspects related to policy implementation.

It is within this setting that House Bill 792 (HB 792) was introduced. With greater concerns about safety from terroristic threats and public shootings, conservative state legislators

have chosen to support public policy that “eviscerate public safety laws involving firearms (Ibid)” as opposed to cooperating with higher education and law enforcement officials to provide adequate funding, training, technology and personnel to ensure our colleges remain safe and secure. The bill, on its face, might seem non-threatening, but when examined within the context of the national campus carry debate, it indiscreetly signals an end to Georgia public colleges and universities being weapons-free zones.

On January 20, 2016, Georgia State Representative Buzz Brockway introduced HB 792 where it was assigned to the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee. After various changes to the original bill, it passed the lower chamber and was sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration. While the campus carry legislation was receiving most of the media and political attention, HB 792 was adopted by the legislature and sent to the Governor for final approval, being deemed as an alternative to the highly contested HB 859 (Fernandes, 2016; Sheinin, 2016, Mar. 24).

On July 1, 2016, individuals, 18 years and older, were legally allowed to carry a Taser, stun gun or other electroshock weapons to their classroom, dorm room, library or any other facility owned or leased by Georgia public higher education institutions.

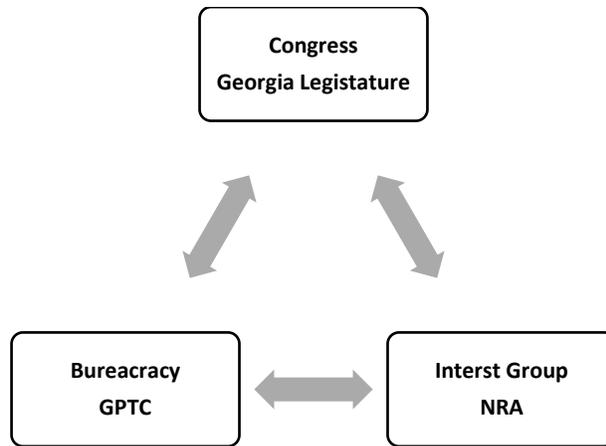
#### **A. Analytical Framework— Policy Network Theory**

Although the policy process does offer some clarity on how HB 792 became law, it does not paint a complete picture. Policymaking is a dynamic process where “individuals with common interests band together formally or informally to press their demands on government (Dye, 2005, 20).” Interest groups, defined by Dye (Ibid) are “a shared-attitude group that makes certain claims upon other groups in the society.” These groups try to influence policymakers to successfully achieve their agenda. As Lecy, Mergel & Schmitz (2014, 651) surmise, “Policy

creation is increasingly shaped by many different actors and interest groups in the networked polity.” Interest groups are “any non-party organization that engages in political activity (Nownes, 2013, 4).

To fully appreciate the role of interest groups in policymaking, administrators and researchers rely on theory, described as “deductive systems of hypotheses or propositions” that is “generalizable to all objects to which it is supposed to be applicable (Sandström & Carlsson, 2008, 507, 511).” Specifically, policy network theory examines how interest groups function within said dynamic process. Enroth (2011, 23) claims it “is a systematic and formalized search for mechanisms that real-world actors could rely upon to increase their ability to predict each other’s strategic choices.” Policy network theory seeks to explain group dynamics and interactions within a political environment. It recognizes that “policymaking includes a large number of public and private actors from different levels and functional areas of government and society (Carlsson, 2000, 504).”

Figure 1 displays the fundamental policy network typology generally referred to as the Iron-Triangle. The Iron Triangle represents the unique, but ever present relationship between the policymakers (congress), policy implementers (bureaucracy), and policy advocates (interest groups). Each of the players in the triangle influences, and is influenced by, each of the other players in what some refer to as “sub-governments.” The strong alliances built between actors on each of the three points of the triangle can create almost impenetrable fortresses that can control policies on various issues, especially those that are highly technical and of low interest to the public at large.



*Figure 1. Iron Triangle*

In public administration, “Scholarship has increasingly adopted new theoretical frameworks, including the concept of ‘networks’ as a form of organizing important governmental functions across independent actors” (Lecy, Mergel, & Schmitz, 2014, 644). Networks, according to Lecy, Mergel, & Schmitz (Ibid, 651), “respond to perceived failures of state authorities to address problems and typically use horizontal cooperation to frame social problems as new agendas.” With regards to policy networks, Leifeld (2012, 731) contends, “The policy network approach assumes that policymaking is affected by a variety of organized governmental and nongovernmental actors who maintain relations like information and resource exchange, influence attribution, or common group membership.” Enroth (2011, 23) speaks of “strategic action among public and private actors under conditions of interdependence,” while Sandström & Carlsson (2008, 498) remark that “policy networks are organized entities that consist of actors and their relations engaged in processes of collective for joint problem solving.”

Interest groups establish policy networks to build and maintain relationships with government officials by offering resources and intellectual capital in exchange for legislative and/or programmatic action. Interest groups recognize the power of collaboration and

cooperation. They play an active role in the policy process from problem identification to policy succession. There is no better example of influence than the National Rifle Association (NRA), founded in 1871 by Col. William C. Church and Gen. George Wingate with the goal to "promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis (NRA)." Eventually, the organization moved beyond rifle shooting and began strategically exerting their political and economic power, as well as their mastery for advocacy mobilization, to support, protect, and expand gun rights at all levels of government.

In analyzing the influence of the NRA, Surowiecki (2015) surmises, "the power of the N.R.A. comes down to money. The organization has an annual operating budget of some quarter of a billion dollars, and between 2000 and 2010 it spent fifteen times as much on campaign contributions as gun-control advocates did." Yet, their greatest resource are members who tend to be "politically engaged and politically active (Ibid)." Affirming this point, the British Broadcasting Company correctly notes that the NRA wields considerable indirect influence via its highly politically engaged membership, many of whom will vote one way or another based on this (gun rights) single issue (British Broadcasting Company, 2016). At last count, NRA membership was over 5 million (Ibid). As an example, when West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin and Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey introduced bipartisan federal legislation for universal background checks and other provisions, Sen. Manchin's office was receiving calls 200 to 1 in opposition to the bill and Sen. Toomey 9 to 1 (Draper, 2013, Dec. 12)."

The influence of the NRA at the federal level is well chronicled, but they also have a significant presence in the state legislature. According to Liberto (2012, Dec. 20), "The NRA wields even more power (at the state level), especially in parts of the country with large populations of registered hunters and gun users." Echoing this point, Spies (2016, Nov. 13)

notes that “to view the gun organization’s influence purely in terms of dollars spent and federal elections won obscures its tremendous clout in statehouse across the U.S. It’s in the legislative chambers outside of Washington D.C. where the most important fights over gun laws are happening.”

HB 792 and HB 859 are two examples of how the NRA leveraged its influence at the state level to pass legislation without receiving any endorsement or approval from the agencies obligated to implement them. President Becker of Georgia State University, echoing the sentiment of many in higher education, states, “I am deeply concerned that if this bill becomes law our campus will become less safe, not more safe as intended by the authors of the bill” (Bluestein, 2016, Mar. 4).

## **B. Policy Network Analysis**

### **1. Interest Group – National Rifle Association**

Understanding the policy process provides greater clarity and guidance as to how HB 792 and HB 280 became law despite national and local opposition to end gun-free/weapons-free zone designation at public higher education institutions. Pro-gun interest groups deftly weaved a fear driven narrative leading to problem identification and policy prioritization. The Virginia Tech tragedy, where Seung Hui Cho killed 32 people and wounded 25 others before turning the gun on himself, was an opportunity to legitimize armed self-defense on college campuses (Goral, 2012). *The Washington Post*, in a 2014 article about the Virginia General Assembly, asserts, “over the six full legislative sessions since Seung Hui Cho’s rampage left 32 dead, it is gun rights, not gun restrictions, that have grown stronger (Laris, 2014, Feb. 11). Grasgreen (2011) expands the conversation by stating, “legislators in about 20 states have proposed such (campus carry) measures since the 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech.”

Strengthening, and to a certain extent, humanizing their narrative of fear, pro-gun advocates also began claiming that campus carry prevents assaults against women (Collins, 2016). This argument was at the heart of the *Campus Carry Act* debate in the Georgia General Assembly last year. Kauffman (2016) notes that “amidst national attention on sexual assault, the latest argument for a proposed “campus carry” law in Georgia is that college students can better protect themselves if they can carry weapons.” In the same article, Kauffman quotes State Rep. Mandi Ballinger, a cosponsor of HB 792 and author of HB 280 (2017 campus carry bill), who contends, “campus carry” is good for women” and that “physically we’re...smaller, and it’s very empowering for most women to be able to have a firearm; it’s an equalizer (Ibid).” Campus carry, to its proponents, better protects students, faculty, and staff from potential harm by allowing individuals to protect themselves as opposed to relying on institutions and agencies. A belief championed by most gun rights advocates.

In 2008, less than a year after the Virginia Tech tragedy, the NRA issued a press release on their website declaring “the model for “Campus Personal Protection Act,” previously discussed in May at ALEC’s Spring Task Force Summit, was officially adopted as model legislation (NRA, 2008).” The act “calls for the repeal of state restrictions on the possession of firearms by valid concealed handgun licensees on college and university campuses and preempts governing bodies of postsecondary educational institutions from imposing such restrictions on permit holders (Ibid).” As stated earlier, within the same year seventeen states introduced measures to allow firearms onto public state colleges and universities (Harnish, 2008). As of 2016, eight states, (Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin) allow firearms on campus while two states (Arkansas and Tennessee) allow only faculty to carry weapons (National Conference of State Legislators, 2016).

Campus carry is a national effort, orchestrated by the NRA, ALEC, and local gun rights organizations to capitalize on past and current active shooter tragedies by offering a policy solution deemed appropriate and justifiable—self-defense as opposed to institutional protection. It is easy to support legislation that placates fear, but extremely difficult to support rational policy solutions in the face of fear. It would be more rational to cooperate with higher education institutions and local law enforcement to develop a strategy that offers protection, promotes personal responsibility, mitigates internal and external threats, and provides resources for victims of crime. Unfortunately, such an option has yet to find serious consideration in this national conversation on campus safety. As of January 2017, eight states allow concealed weapons on campus. Four states allow concealed guns on campus, but schools limit locations and who carries. In Ten states, concealed guns on campus is prohibited by law. In seventeen states, the law permits schools to determine the weapons policy. The remaining eight states allow concealed guns only in locked cars in parking lots.

## **2. Congress**

To better illustrate the correlation between the aforementioned model legislation and current campus carry efforts, in 2013, Texas State Senator Brian Birdwell authored the *Campus Personal Protection Act* (SB 281), which would have allowed “students, faculty and staff with a concealed handgun license to carry firearms for personal protection on college campuses” while also preventing colleges and universities from circumventing the intent of the Act by imposing administrative bans or penalties (Office of Texas State Senator Brian Birdwell, 2013).” SB 281 was an obvious reproduction of the NRA/ALEC model bill. Although SB 281 failed, the same senator introduced a similar measure in 2015, SB 11, which was adopted into law (SB 11, 2015).

Regarding HB 792, it is part of the campus carry narrative and an incremental step towards ending gun free/weapons free zone designation at Georgia public colleges and universities. Politically, it was “a compromise between Second Amendment advocates who sought the right to carry guns on campus and those opposed (Fox News, 2016).”

Fernandes (2016) accurately surmises that “he (Brockway) plan[ned] to introduce legislation that puts an unusual spin on the concept [of campus carry]—allowing people to carry Tasers and stun guns.” In the same interview, Brockway admits he “thought maybe this could be a middle ground between not allowing firearms at all but still allowing some additional personal protection for students and other people (Ibid).” He supports carrying firearms on campus, but realizes “even if campus carry becomes legal, not everybody is going to want to carry a gun (Torres, 2016, Feb. 23).”

Brockway’s genius, whether intentional or not, was expanding the definition of campus carry to include non-lethal weapons. It was a smart political move that softened the conversation by deemphasizing lethal force, which in turn, increased legislative support, thereby rendering the bill more viable and less threatening. The vote count for HB 792 and HB 859 support this observation. The former received 119 Yeas and 50 Nays in the House and 43 Yeas and 12 Nays in the Senate (HB 792, 2016; HB 859, 2016). Seven democrats voted for HB 792 in the House and four in the Senate (Ibid). In comparison, the latter bill received 113 Yeas and 59 Nays in the House and 34 Yeas and 17 Nays in the Senate (Ibid). In the House, none of the members who voted for HB 792 voted for HB 859 (Ibid). That same scenario occurred in the Senate (Ibid). Democrats could back campus carry if specific to non-lethal weapons, but all were in opposition to allowing guns onto college campuses.

HB 792 did not offer any instruction or guidance on how to execute its legislative intent—allowing anyone 18 years or older to carry an electroshock weapon onto a public college and university for self-defense. It is the responsibility of the agencies in question, the University System of Georgia (USG) and Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), to determine how to introduce this new reality within their colleges and universities. Issues pertaining to resource allocation, personnel, training, policy, signage and other implementation matters are silent in the law. It is incumbent of administrators and campus leaders to ‘figure it out.’

Unfortunately, higher education is already beset with a myriad of challenges, from trying to increase graduation rates and financing renovation to stabilizing rising tuition costs and keeping pace with technological innovation (Strikwerda, 2015; Selingo, 2016; Manning, 2015). Allowing weapons onto campuses further complicates matters. For community colleges, these and other issues exist and persist. One recent national report claims community colleges face seven challenges—Low completion rates, students not prepared for college, wide skills gap, undefined mission, minimal collaboration between schools, lack of community support, and lackluster results (Chen, 2017). Now, at least in Georgia, community and technical colleges must add to their responsibility the safe implementation of a policy that allows weapons into their lecture halls, offices, libraries and public spaces.

### **3. Bureaucracy – Georgia Piedmont Technical College**

For purposes of this paper, the authors will explore the implications of HB 792 on urban two-year open campuses, with specific attention to Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC), a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). It is believed that enactment of this law could potentially compromise public safety policies and procedures, divert limited resources, and create a more dangerous campus environment.

The Technical College System of Georgia was established in 2008 from the previously named the Department of Technical and Adult Education (The Governor’s Budget Report FY18, 311). It comprises of 22 technical colleges throughout the state providing “a unified network of technical education, adult education, and customized business and industry training throughout the state (TCSG FY17 Strategic Plan, 2016).” Its mission is to provide “technical, academic and adult education and training focused on building a well-educated, globally competitive workforce for Georgia (Ibid).” It is led by Commissioner Gretchen Corbin, appointed to the position by Governor Nathan Deal in 2015 and governed by a board of 23 people, fourteen representing congressional districts and nine at-large members (TCSG website).

In AY 2016, 135,786 students were enrolled in one of its 22 colleges with 51,954 earning a Technical Certificate of Credit, Diploma or an Associate’s Degree, 11,731 high school students participating in dual enrollment, 3,682 businesses receiving customized training and professional development, and 57,868 Georgians participating in the adult education program. Table 1 reflects the total TCSG funding from 2014 to 2018.

<b>Table 1. TCSG Annual Budgets for the Last Five Years</b>					
TCSG Annual Budget	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
Total Budget	\$743M	\$771M	\$768M	\$774M	\$784M
State Contribution	\$313M	\$331M	\$339M	\$350M	\$359M

*Source: Suggs (2017). TCSG Fast Facts, 2016; Office of Planning and Budget, 2016 and 2017.*

The State Board is responsible for establishing policies that assist the system and its colleges to effectively implement state law. The State Board Policies and TCSG Procedures Manual govern the system and its colleges. As stipulated in procedure 1.1p., Development, Approval and Review of TCSG Policies and Procedures—

It is the policy of the State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia to operate under the direction of State Board Policies. The Board has delegated authority to the Commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia and technical college presidents to develop accompanying operating procedures. These policies and procedures provide guidance to staff in their day to day activities; ensure compliance with applicable federal and state laws (TCSG State Board Policies, 2017).

These policies provide greater specificity as opposed to state statutes. In Section 3, titled Administration, the manual consists of policies on operations and emergency preparedness among other administrative functions. Specifically, under Policy: 3.3.10, Firearms, Weapons, and Explosives, it states “the possession, carrying, or transportation of a firearm, weapon, or explosive compound/material in the TCSG System Office or on any technical college campus shall be governed by Georgia state law (TCSG State Board Policies, 2017).” This policy is rather generic and written as more of a catchall in case new laws emerge that allow for weapons, i.e. guns onto college campuses.

Once the TCSG State Board has adopted a new or amended measure, it is the responsibility of the colleges to effectively implement it. For this paper, the author will examine how Georgia Piedmont Technical College implemented said policy and if doing so compromised public safety policies and procedures, diverted limited resources, and created a more dangerous campus environment, especially one with a diverse minority and immigrant student population.

Within the Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC) 2015-2016 Student Handbook, under the section titled Institutional Policies, exists a subsection titled Firearms, Weapons, and Explosives that restates the State Board policy. The handbook summarizes the policy followed by a glossary of terms where a Taser or stun guns are defined as weapons. The policy for GPTC is clear on the issue of firearms and weapons on campus. It is prohibited “unless otherwise provided by law (GPTC Student Handbook).”

GPTC was established in 1961 as the DeKalb Vocational School by the DeKalb County School District. In 1996 it became part of the state Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE), which is now the Technical College System of Georgia. In 2000 its name changed to DeKalb Technical College and in 2011 it changed again to its current name (GPTC Student Handbook). The college is led by Dr. Jabari Simama, appointed as president in 2012, and is governed by a local board of directors (See Appendix A).

GPTC's main campus is in Clarkston, Georgia. The college has nine additional campus located in DeKalb, Morgan, Newton, and Rockdale counties. The vision of the college is to be the "premier institution for technical and adult education with a global commitment to personal, professional, and community transformation (GPTC, Vision, Mission & Goals)." The college is guided by four strategic goals: 1) Educational Excellence, 2) Engagement Excellence, 3) Management Excellence, and 4) Communication Excellence (Ibid).

As a unit of TCSG, Georgia Piedmont is responsible for providing technical and adult education as well as customized training for business and industry. In AY16 over 12,000 students were enrolled in the college. During the same year, 3,344 credentials were issued (Technical Certificates of Credit, Diplomas and Degrees). In FY16, GPTC generated almost \$39M in revenue with the state providing \$14.5M, tuition adding another \$5.6M, and other funds contributing about \$16.6M. Total expenses for the college equaled \$36.5M with about \$24.6M allocated for personnel (GPTC Annual Report, 2017).

For GPTC and other colleges, the Georgia campus carry campaign, represented by House Bills 859 (HB 859), 792, and 280, imposes a national conservative political agenda onto public institutions that have historically opposed such policy (Office of Governor Nathan Deal, 2016; Cramer, 2014; Gertz, 2012; Harnisch, 2008; Morse, Sisneros, Perez, Sponsler, 2016). The

University System of Georgia (USG) Chancellor Steve Wrigley, speaking before the Georgia House Public Safety and Homeland Security committee about HB 280, recently affirmed such opposition, stating “We [USG] respectively oppose any change to current law (Sheinin, 2017, Feb. 20).” This position is consistent with many Georgia voters. *An Atlanta Journal-Constitution* poll in January 2017 revealed 54 percent of voters did not want state legislators to reintroduce campus carry legislation (Torres, 2017, Jan. 8).

As stated earlier, in recent years there have been numerous mass shootings throughout the United States. Many have occurred in high-density locations such as public schools, shopping malls, nightclubs, offices, and even on college campuses (Morse, Sisneros, Perez, Sponsler, 2016, 3; Nedzel, 2014, 429; Bartula, Bowen, 2015, 2). Locally, several well-chronicled crimes have occurred at or near colleges and universities (Davis, 2016, Apr. 16). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* notes, “Students on in-town Atlanta campuses reported being victims of violent crimes—including armed robbery and assault—at a rate 50 percent higher than that of students at all Georgia campuses (Ibid).”

Because of national tragedies and a perceived increase in local crime on college campuses, legislators at the Georgia General Assembly felt compelled to act. During the 2016 legislative session, two bills were introduced to address campus safety. Neither bill increased resources for technology upgrades, training, expansion of police powers, improving intergovernmental relations with local law enforcement or funding for public safety personnel.

Both measures sought to allow weapons onto Georgia public colleges and universities. HB 859, the *Campus Carry Act*, would have allowed a licensed gun owner, 21 years of age or older, to carry a firearm onto any public postsecondary institution with few exceptions (e.g. dorms, stadiums) (HB 859, 2016). HB 792, sometimes referred to as Campus Carry Lite, was

defined as a nonlethal alternative that would allow any person 18 years of age or older to carry an electroshock weapon (e.g. Taser or stun guns) onto public colleges or universities (Fernandes, 2016; HB 792, 2016). Governor Nathan Deal vetoed HB 859, but signed HB 792 into law taking effect on July 1, 2016.

Undeterred in 2017, members of the State House of Representatives filed HB 280. This bill was identical to HB 792 except for additional provisions to satisfy Gov. Deal, who opposed the latter bill because it did not exempt “on-campus child care facilities, faculty or administrative office space, and disciplinary meetings (HB 280, 2017; Bluestein, 2017, Mar. 7).” The article also speculates that Gov. Deal “hasn’t closed the door on the measure this year (Ibid).” Therefore, the possibility of Georgia public colleges and universities maintaining its gun-free zone designation seems to be at risk.

It would have been more prudent and practical for state legislators to follow the leadership of college and university presidents, like Georgia State University President Dr. Mark Becker, who, in responding to public safety concerns, launched a series of safety initiatives (Davis, 2016, Apr. 16). Rather, conservative state legislators chose a more politically expedient path to satisfy certain interest groups who sought the expansion of gun rights, or in this case weapon rights, in previously declared gun-free/weapon-free zones.

Morse, Sisneros, Perez, and Sponsler (2016) offer alternatives to reducing violence beyond allowing weapons on campus. Alternatives that Dr. Becker and other metro Atlanta college presidents would surely welcome. Some of their recommendations include threat assessment and behavioral intervention teams, offering mental health support services, establishing crisis response protocols, bystander intervention programs, technology upgrades and improving intergovernmental relations with local law enforcement. The focus should be on

making colleges and universities safer, not pursuing or supporting a policy that benefits political interest groups.

Passage of HB 792 is not solely the result of mass shootings and local crimes, but a national push by lobbyists to expand gun rights onto college campuses. It is part of a much larger conversation on 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights, self-protection and eliminating gun-free zones (Mulhere, 2015; *The New York Times*, 2015). Furthermore, the enactment of this law could potentially compromise public safety policies and procedures, divert limited resources, and create a more dangerous campus environment, especially for urban open campuses with diverse minority and immigrant student populations such as Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC).

If an employee is caught with a weapon on campus they “shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal as well as possible criminal prosecution.” If a student is caught, he or she “shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion consistent with guidelines of the affected technical college’s Student Code of Conduct as well as possible criminal prosecution.” Any volunteer or visitor is subject to criminal prosecution (Ibid). The person responsible for enforcing this policy is Chief Melody Maddox, who oversees campus police and security. She reports directly to Mr. Keith Sagers, COO for the college, who in turn reports directly to the president.

## **C. Research Methodology**

### **1. Research Design**

This study relied upon a mixed method research design to analyze the merits of carry policies based on stakeholder safety concerns. Secondary data was obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the U.S. Department of Education databases to assess crime levels

on U.S. campuses. Additionally, a survey was administered to five college administrators at Georgia Piedmont Technical College to assess their opinions regarding the following questions:

- a. Are Georgia public colleges and universities safe? What about Georgia Piedmont Technical College?
- b. Should students, faculty and staff be allowed to carry weapons onto college campuses to protect themselves?
- c. Will implementation of HB 792 impact your policies, procedures, operations, budget or any other administrative and operational matters pertaining to public safety?
- d. Does allowing weapons onto Georgia Piedmont Technical College effect how you will police the campus? (See Appendix B)

As previously mentioned, the intent of this study is to analyze the merit of a community college's campus carry policy. The study seeks answers to the following research questions:

Q1. What is the relationship between student enrollment violent crime on campus in Georgia and throughout the Southeast?; and Q2. What are the greatest concerns of college administrators regarding campus carry?

## **2. Data Analysis:**

### **Q1. What is the relationship between student enrollment violent crime on campus in Georgia and throughout the Southeast?;**

Table 2 reflects Georgia's university/college enrollment levels and crimes from 2013 to 2016. The highest enrollment (n=365,482) occurred in 2016, while the highest rate of violent crimes (n=193) occurred in 2014. Additionally, the most frequent crimes are property and larceny/theft crimes which. As Georgia's university/college enrollment continues to grow ( $\bar{x}$ =336,805), the major of offenses are property crimes (n=3270) and larceny/theft (n=2939).

**Table 2**  
**Georgia Offenses Known to Law Enforcement by University and College, 2013 – 2016**

Year	Total University/College Enrollment	Total Violent crime	Property crime	Burglary	Larceny-theft	Motor vehicle theft	Arson
2013	275,685	133	3,505	250	3,192	63	6
2014	350,316	193	3,508	277	3,152	79	0
2015	355,736	139	3,103	240	2,791	72	1
2016	365,482	151	2,962	263	2,622	77	3
<b>Mean</b>	<b>336,805</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>3,270</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>2,939</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program.

Figures 2 through 6 reflect trends of the criminal offenses most often cited as justifications for campus carry policies from 2005 to 2015. The highest rate of murders (n=4) on Georgia campuses occurred in 2015, while there were none reported in 2007, 2008, and 2010.

#### Georgia Reported Criminal Offenses By Type Of Crime (Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter)

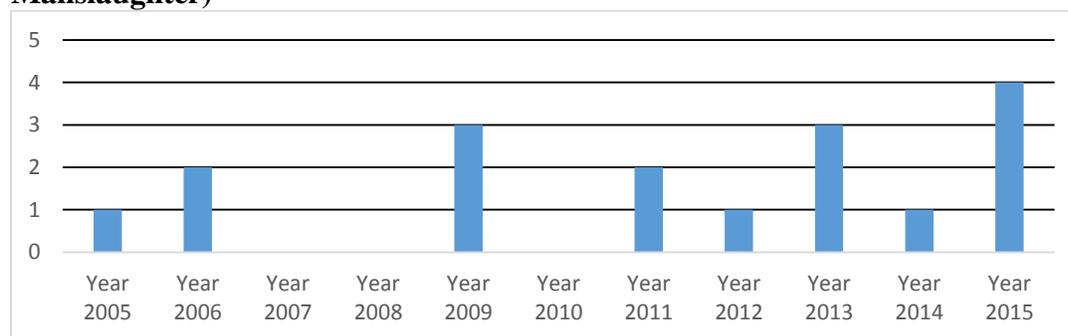
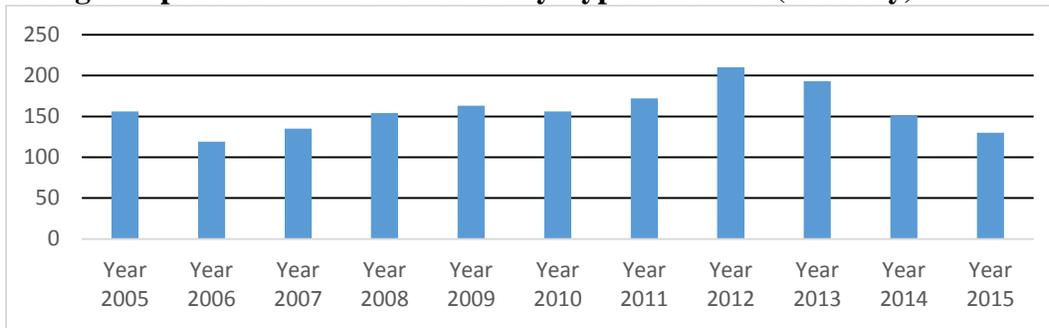


Figure 2. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey.

The rate of robberies on Georgia campuses remained consistent with the least amount occurring in 2006 and the highest rate of robberies in 2012. Since then, the robbery rate has continued to decline (Figure 3).

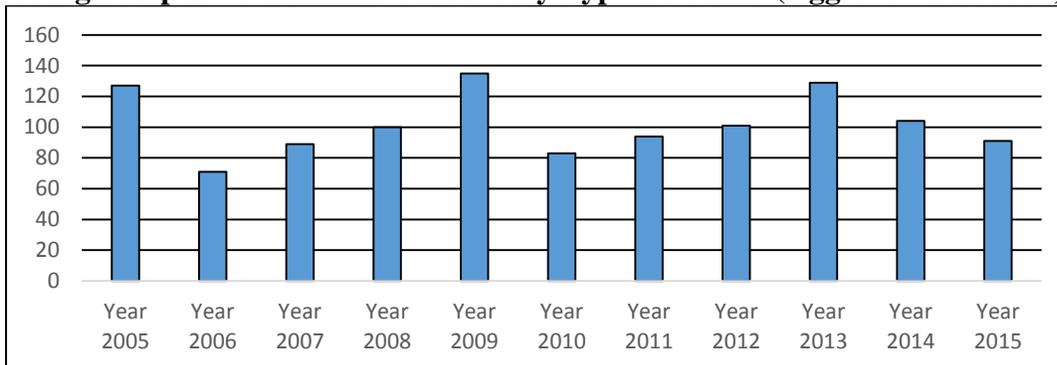
### Georgia Reported Criminal Offenses By Type Of Crime (Robbery)



*Figure 3.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey.

The rate of aggravated assaults has remained unstable with the highest level occurring in 2009, and the lowest level in 2006. Since 2013, the rate of aggravated assaults has declined annually (Figure 4).

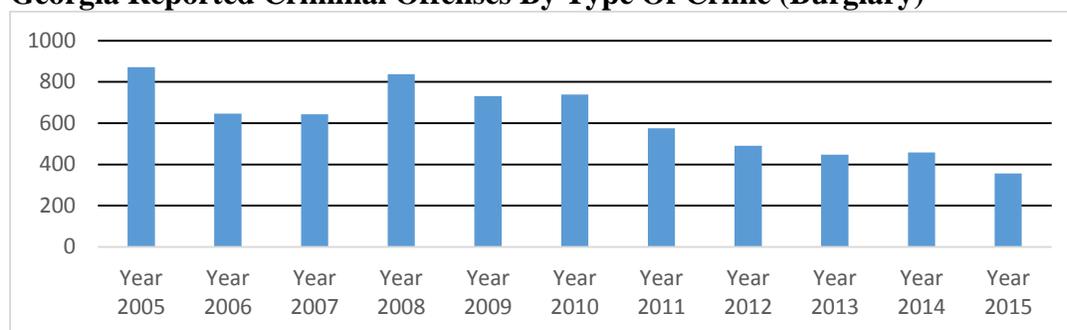
### Georgia Reported Criminal Offenses By Type Of Crime (Aggravated Assault)



*Figure 4.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey.

The rate of burglaries on Georgia campuses peaked at nearly 900 in 2005. With the exception of 2008, the rate of burglaries has declined since with the lowest level occurring in 2015 (n=350) (Figure 5).

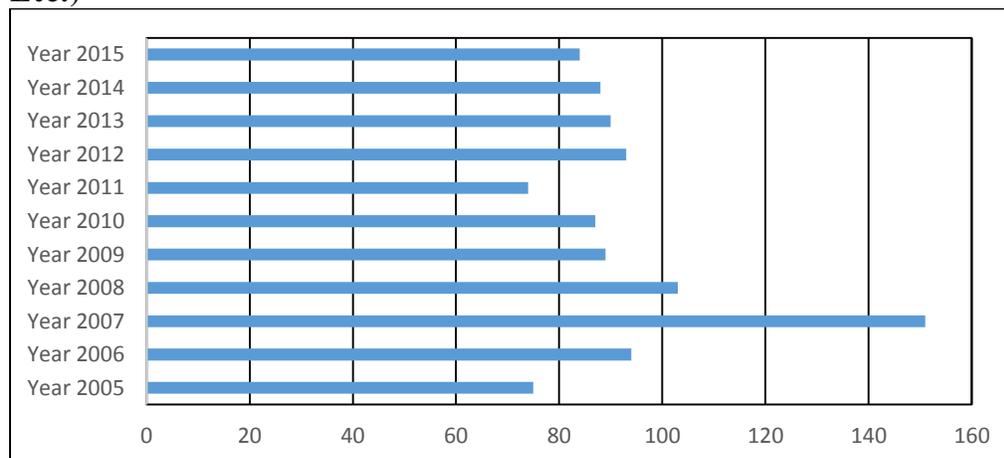
### Georgia Reported Criminal Offenses By Type Of Crime (Burglary)



*Figure 5.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey.

In addition to analyzing the types of offenses most often utilized as justification for campus carry policies, it is helpful to examine the level of gun-related offenses. Figure 6 reflects the trend of weapons offenses on Georgia campuses from 2005 to 2015. The highest level of weapon related arrests occurred in 2007 (n=150), with the lowest level occurring in 2011 (n=75). The rate of weapon related offenses has remained consistent, ranging from 80 to 90 annually.

### Georgia Reported Arrests By Type Of Crime (Weapons: Carrying, Possessing, Etc.)



*Figure 6.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security (CSS) survey.

In the same year HB792 was passed permitting the carry and possession of electroshock weapons on Georgia campuses, Georgia had the second highest enrollment compared to that of

seven other Southeastern states. Florida had the highest enrollment ( $n=388,217$ ), and Mississippi had the lowest enrollment ( $n=59,604$ ). During the same year, Georgia had the highest total violent crime ( $n=151$ ) and Mississippi had the lowest violent crime rate on campus ( $n=33$ ). Georgia and South Carolina were the only states with murder offenses during this period. Additionally, Georgia's campus experienced a higher than average rate of rapes ( $\bar{x} = 51$ ), robberies ( $\bar{x} = 62$ ); however, the aggravated assaults were slightly lower than average ( $\bar{x} = 37$ ). Lastly, a strong relationship exists between the college enrollment and total violent crimes on campus in Georgia and the other Southeastern states with each state returning a strong correlation coefficient ( $r=.99$ ) (Figure 7).

#### **Southeastern States' Enrollment and Violent Crime Offenses, 2016**

State	Total University/College Enrollment	Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Total Violent crime	Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ )
Alabama	105,923	0	14	8	65	87	0.99999982
Florida	388,217	0	39	32	28	99	0.99999999
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>365,482</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>151</b>	
Louisiana	148,786	0	19	31	48	98	0.99999996
Mississippi	59,604	0	12	9	12	33	0.99999999
North Carolina	250,430	0	61	31	36	128	0.99999999
South Carolina	169,950	1	20	41	26	88	0.99999999
Tennessee	219,998	0	36	21	52	109	0.99999998
<b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b>	<b>213,549</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>99</b>	

Figure 7. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program.

#### **Q2. What are the greatest concerns of college administrators regarding campus carry?**

The question remains, will the implementation of HB 792 and HB 280, weapons onto GPTC campuses, and whose largest campus in central DeKalb County is easily accessible to the

public, and consists of a very diverse student population, compromise public safety policies and procedures, divert limited resources, and create a more dangerous campus environment? To obtain an answer, key college personnel and local public agency officials who would be most impacted by the implementation of this new policy were interviewed. Specifically, a total of five individuals, two college administrators and three law enforcement officials were asked to answer eight questions (see Appendix B).

Based on their answers each participant believes Georgia public colleges and universities are safe, including the main campus of Georgia Piedmont Technical College. As well, each law enforcement official did not oppose having weapons on campus. A few indicated some stipulations were required and advocated for weapons training. Two administrators strongly opposed weapons on campus.

Both external law enforcement officials did not believe implementation of HB 792 would impact their policies, procedures, operations, budgets or other administrative/operational matters. Both administrators commented that HB 792 would have an impact by requiring a comprehensive education campaign, changes in school policy, additional training, and possibly hiring additional campus security personnel.

None of the survey participants thought the implementation of HB 792 would be of greater concern for minority, immigrant, and refugee students at GPTC with the exception of one respondent who, although not categorically stating there is greater concern, does acknowledge “an increase in harmful and hostile rhetoric against minorities, immigrant[s], and refugees.” Furthermore, all three of the college employees who participated in the survey believe GPTC students would not support weapons on campus. However, no evidence was given to validate

their contentions. Overall, the consensus among the survey participants was that training and education were the best ways to improve campus safety.

### **3. Findings**

The responses were consistent with national surveys and reports. West (2016) states that “University administrators and faculty members have argued that guns would discourage the teaching of sensitive issues” and that “a campus-carry law would bring millions of dollars in added costs for higher insurance, security, training and counseling.” Regarding local law enforcement, there does not seem to be any data capturing their opinion as it relates to campus carry. Yet, a national survey of 15,000 law enforcement officials does offer some insight on how they feel about gun control (Songer, 2013). According to the survey, 70 percent of respondents support law enforcement leadership openly opposing the execution of more restrictive gun laws, 28 percent of officers believe having more permissive concealed carry policies would help in preventing large scale shootings, 90 percent believe casualties would decrease if armed citizens were present at the onset of an active shooter incident, 80 percent support arming K-12 school teachers and administrators, and 43 percent contend training should not be required to legally own a handgun (Ibid). These opinions are not very different from the opinions given by the law enforcement officials who participated in this author’s survey.

The impact of HB 792 and HB 280 on GPTC policies, procedures, resources, and climate is predicated on perspective. For college administrators, such policy does not further their mission to provide a quality postsecondary education and workforce training. Based on their responses, HB 792 will require the amending of policies, additional spending on public safety education and staffing, and more training for students, faculty and staff alike. To local law enforcement, allowing weapons on campus does not change how they enforce the law.

Nonetheless, both the college and local law enforcement must work collectively to maintain the peace and prevent weapons from undermining peace onto GPTC.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Since the 2007, with the shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech, the National Rifle Association (NRA) has aggressively pursued a national agenda to expand gun rights onto public colleges and universities. Other incidences of gun violence and/or domestic terrorism over the last ten years has emboldened their efforts to advocate for state legislation that supports their philosophy with regards to personal safety and individual liberty.

As of 2016, 10 states allow firearms on their college and university beyond those issued to campus police. For proponents of campus carry, expanding gun rights reduces crime, protects women from assault, while nominally disrupting the lives of students or their pursuit of an education. Opponents argue firearms on campus will undermine academic freedom, change the climate of the institution, and require additional costs to ensure safe implementation. Nationally, postsecondary institutions have strongly opposed allowing weapons on campus. Unfortunately, their concerns have fallen on deaf ears at numerous state capitols across the United States.

Georgia has not been immune to this phenomenon. In 2016, the state legislature adopted HB 859, the *Campus Carry Act*, which was uncharacteristically vetoed by Governor Nathan Deal. HB 859 was introduced as crimes at or near college campuses were receiving significant attention. During the same session, Rep. Buzz Brockway authored HB 792, commonly referred to as Campus Carry Lite. His bill allows individual 18 years and older to carry an electroshock weapon onto a public college and university. On July 1, 2016, HB 792 became law. Prior to passage of this measure, higher education institutions were considered weapons-free zones. In 2017, the state legislature passed HB 280, a modified version of HB 859. It now sits on the desk of the Governor who has not displayed the same level of concern as last

year. By the fall semester of 2017, public colleges and universities in Georgia could very well see students, faculty, and staff carry lethal and nonlethal weapons onto their campuses.

This paper sought to explore the policy network theory and the role of the legislators, interest groups, and bureaucracy securing passage of HB 792, and what the implications would be for public colleges and universities. To narrow the scope, the authors focused on Georgia Piedmont Technical College, a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), whose main campus, located in central DeKalb County, is open and accessible to the public.

This research examined the NRA *via* the policy network theory, which seeks to explain group dynamics and interactions within a political environment. Interest groups establish policy networks to build and maintain relationships with government officials by offering resources and intellectual capital in exchange for legislative and/or programmatic action. Interest groups recognize the power of collaboration and cooperation. Without question, they play an active role in the policy process from problem identification to policy succession. HB 792 was an example of how the NRA and local gun rights advocates leveraged their influence and resources to assure policy adoption even in the face of staunch opposition from the University System of Georgia (USG).

By examining HB 792, and the campus carry debate, within the policy process it became evident the NRA was very influential at each stage. They created a fear driven narrative by capitalizing on recent tragic events while ‘softening’ their argument by claiming campus carry can protect women from assault. The NRA, working with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), also provided conservative state legislators model legislation and political cover. Furthermore, they used their vast financial resources and politically active membership to strategically maintain pressure.

The second intent was to explore the implications of HB 792 on urban two-year open campuses, specifically Georgia Piedmont Technical College. This was accomplished by reviewing system and college policies as well as conducting an eight- question survey of five individuals, two administrators and three law enforcement officials, who would be most impacted by the enactment of HB 792. Their responses were reflective of national views on the issue. Overall, the impact of HB 792 on GPTC policies, procedures, resources and climate is predicated on perspective. For college administrators, HB 792 will require the amending of policies, additional spending on public safety education and staffing, and more training for students, faculty and staff alike. To local law enforcement, allowing weapons on campus does not change how they enforce the law.

Lastly, we considered the concerns of the two primary stakeholders in the campus carry debate: college/university students and the college/university administrators charged with protecting the students. Our findings suggest a relationship exists between college/university enrollment levels and violent crime on campus in Georgia to that the college/university enrollment and violent crime in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. While Georgia and Tennessee have moved forward with laws permitting campus carry of weapons, Alabama permits schools to decide their weapon. In contrast, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina prohibit campus carry, but permit concealed weapons in vehicles. Louisiana prohibits campus carry.

The reality is Georgia public colleges and universities are operating under a new paradigm. No longer will they enjoy the unique designation as a gun-free/weapons-free zone. College presidents, administrators, and local law enforcement must work in tandem to maintain

the peace while also taking the necessary steps to educate and empower the college community to stay vigilant, alert, and safe.

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## **VI. Appendices**

Appendix A. Georgia Piedmont Technical College Organization Chart

Appendix B. House Bill 792 Implementation Survey



## Appendix B.

<b>Participant Division</b>	<b>Q1</b> Are Georgia public colleges and universities safe? What about Georgia Piedmont Technical College?	<b>Q2</b> Should students, faculty and staff be allowed to carry weapons onto college campuses to protect themselves?	<b>Q3</b> Will implementation of HB 792 impact your policies, procedures, operations, budget or any other administrative and operational matters pertaining to public safety?	<b>Q4</b> Does allowing weapons onto Georgia Piedmont Technical College effect how you will police the campus?
Academic Affairs	Yes, but the institutions are open which makes it impossible to stop all threats. What GTPC can control is how it responds to threats.	No	Yes, but there must be a lot of work done to educate the campus community. Policies should be adjusted and additional training offered.	I think campus police would have to increase the number of officers to help the college community feel more safe.
Administration	Yes, the college works very hard to ensure a safe and secure environment.	No.	Yes, the college must develop additional communications, increase security, and change existing policy.	No, our officers operate from the premise that weapons are already on campus.
Public Safety	Yes.	Yes, with some stipulations.	It will impact school policies and liability.	No, we will continue to be vigilant in our work.
Public Safety	Yes, GPTC has a low crime rate given the population of students, employees, and visitors.	We will enforce whatever law governs this issue.	No, we have strict rules, regulations, guidelines, and training on dealing with armed subjects.	No, our department encounters people who are armed every day.
Public Safety	Yes, Georgia public colleges and universities are safe.	I am a huge 2 <sup>nd</sup> amendment proponent, but training should be required.	No, it would not impact our department.	No.

*House Bill 792 Implementation Survey*